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THE LITTLE FLOCK

On January 29 the Bureau of Public Safety in Shanghai arrested Li Yuan-ju, Wang P'ei-chen, Lang Chih-i and Chang Yu-chih, who since the imprisonment of Watchman Ni in April, 1952, have been the leaders of the Little Flock, with headquarters at Nanyang Road. The Little Flock is one of the largest Protestant denominations in China, entirely indigenous, and with a conservative literalistic theology of pentecostal and millenarian tendencies. It was founded by Watchman Ni, a native of Foochow, in the early 1920's.

Tien Feng for February 6 devotes eleven pages to the arrest of these men and to a review of Watchman Ni's case. After a lengthy editorial by the editor of Tien Feng, a news item and an editorial from the Liberation Daily are reproduced, and then comes the official accusation of Watchman Ni, which the authorities had not published until January 30 of this year. In this statement the most concrete charge seems to be that in 1950 Watchman Ni went to Hong Kong, and there reported to Nationalist emissaries the results of the February 6 air raid on Shanghai, and also told them of the liver fluke epidemic among the Communist soldiers in Kiangsu and Chekiang. The statement goes on to say that Watchman Ni, along with two others arrested with him, Chang Tzu-chieh and Ni Hong-tsu, are now in the Bureau of Public Safety's First Prison in Shanghai. Then there is a short statement by Bishop Robin Chen, reproduced from the Liberation Daily, in which he states that Protestants are very happy over the arrest of these men.

But the most interesting article is one which tells of a mass denunciation meeting held in Shanghai on January 30. All of the Protestant pastors and all of the Little Flock Nanyang Road church members were present (probably by order), for a total of 2,500 persons. Lo Chu-feng, Chairman of the Shanghai Religious Affairs Bureau, was chairman of the meeting. Shanghai's Vice-mayor, Hsu Chien-kuo, gave the main address. Below is the gist of the address, which I report without comment, as I feel sure our readers will be able to do any necessary reading between the lines.

After reporting the facts of the arrest he went on to discuss the religious policy of the government. The People's Government guarantees freedom of religious belief, and this policy is very clear and definite. For example, since Catholic Bishop Kung Ping-mei was arrested last September, there has been no interference with the religious life of Catholics in Shanghai. Instead, their religious activities have proceeded normally. The People's Government has guaranteed freedom of religious belief in the past, it does so now, and will continue to do so in the future. There need be no doubt on this point. You members of the Little Flock know that ever since liberation your religious activities have continued without interference -- meetings for breaking bread, administrative meetings, fellowship meetings. This is a proof of the government's policy of freedom of religious belief. Only counter-revolutionaries with an ulterior motive will try to pervert the facts and say that this is persecution of the church, that a time of disaster has come upon the church.

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The People's Government treats all religions and all sects within a religion with equal benevolence, requiring only that they love their country and obey the laws. The present question is one of counter-revolutionaries hidden within the Little Flock, who spread rumors and prevent their church members from drawing close to the government, thus arousing in their hearts many unnecessary doubts and fears.

Some people say, the Communist Party is materialist, why should it promise freedom of religious belief? Yes, the Communist Party is materialist. But this fact and the guarantee of religious freedom are two different things, which should not be confused. Just because the Communist Party is materialist, it approaches questions realistically. At present there are religious believers among the people, and these have their religious demands; the Communist Party recognizes this fact. Religious belief is a matter of individual thinking. If religious believers love their country, obey the laws, and along with the rest of the people uphold the interests of their country, we promise them freedom to believe as they please; this policy is very clear. But unfortunately some counter-revolutionaries slyly emphasize the difference between materialism and idealism (all non-materialistic philosophies are idealistic in the Communist vocabulary) in their writings, and thus arouse the emotions of people and break the people's unity.

The Government's policy is very clear. It allows freedom of religious belief, but will not allow counter-revolutionaries to use this freedom for the purpose of carrying on their activities, nor on the other hand will it allow the prosecution of these counter-revolutionaries to proceed to the point of interfering with the normal religious life of church members. Proper religious activities will be sincerely protected, while counter-revolutionaries who wear the cloak of religion will be vigorously prosecuted. But the prosecution of these counter-revolutionary elements hidden within the church does not come within the scope of religious belief, it is a government matter only. The more completely these men are rooted out of the church, the purer religion will be, and the surer the guarantee of freedom of religious belief. Therefore, instead of being a disaster, these arrests are a great good fortune to the church.

The next paragraph deals with the great achievements and still greater aims of the government in setting up a socialist economy, and the consequent necessity for complete unity among the people in working for these aims. He then goes on to consider the reason for the arrest of these men. Some people say that even if they have done some things that are not right, they have done so from sincere religious convictions, and therefore they should not be punished. Such criticism shows political immaturity, but it also shows an ignorance of the seriousness of the crimes these men have committed. These crimes he lists under five headings, with some details under each. They have supported imperialism and the Nationalists; they have opposed popular movements; they have corrupted youth; they have sabotaged production; and they have acted licentiously. Under the last point no charge is brought against the men recently arrested, but only against Watchman Ni, who is said to have confessed to seducing more than a hundred women.

In the third section of his address Mr. Hsu deals with specific objections to the arrest of these men. First, it has been said that these men seemed to be patriotic, and certainly were very zealous in their church work. Why should they be arrested? Mr. Hsu's answer is that whatever patriotic utterances they have made were only a false front for their counter-revolutionary schemes.

Second, were these men arrested because they opposed the Three Self Movement? "Certainly not. They were arrested purely because of their counter-revolutionary activities. Of course, to oppose the Three Self Patriotic Movement is not a good thing, and those who do so should be helped and instructed. But the opposition of Watchman Ni and his gang of counter-revolutionaries to the Three Self Movement was not a matter of principle, but had its own secret purpose. For example they say that they had never had any connection with imperialism, they had always observed the Three Self principles. But as a matter of fact, from investigations still not completed, we learn that they have received first and last more than \$60,000. American currency from American sources."

Third, will the government in rooting out counter-revolutionaries interfere in matters of religious belief? Certainly not. There is no ground for any such suspicion. The rooting out of

counter-revolutionaries has no relation to religion. But on the other hand we must make it clear that the government will not allow anyone to use religion to obstruct the establishment of a socialist economy, to oppose popular movements, or to carry on counter-revolutionary activities. Religion is religion, and faith is faith, they must not be mixed up with a person's private counter-revolutionary ideas, and used to spread the poison of hate towards country and people.

We have not considered the Little Flock as such as a counter-revolutionary organ, nor taken any steps to proscribe it, but have only prosecuted counter-revolutionary elements hidden within it. We sincerely protect the right of religious belief and of proper religious life. Therefore, what you have believed in the past, you may continue to believe now, and you may believe it in the future. The government will ask no questions about it. We require only that religious believers love their country and uphold socialism. Therefore there need be no concern about the right of religious belief.

Mr. Hsu closed with three words of exhortation and warning. First, every Christian should enter positively into the struggle to expose the crimes of these men who have been arrested. Second, although our arrests have been limited to these few persons, we still have serious questions about a number of others. For the present we let them alone, to see if they will repent and show a new attitude. Through our investigations of the past few years, we have a great deal of information on file, which we will use if need be. Those who do not heed this warning must take the consequences. Third, you who are members of the Little Flock should not be afraid of airing your dirty linen in public, but should vigorously seek out and expose all offenders.

Mr. Hsu's final word was: This struggle has just begun, and we will not draw back until we have completed it victoriously, until we have completely rooted out every counter-revolutionary hidden within the Little Flock.

Following Mr. Hsu's speech a member of the Nanyang Road Little Flock, who is a student in the Shanghai Second Medical School, made a denunciatory speech, which the editor of Tien Feng promises us will appear in the next number of the magazine. Then many other members of the Nanyang Road church also tried to speak, but as it was time to close, Chairman Lo Chufeng shut them off, promising them another opportunity to present their accusations.

Church Membership

FUTSING DISTRICT, METHODIST

How is the church in China faring numerically? Readers will remember that the figures Bishop Robin Chen gave a little over a year ago for the Sheng Kung Hui (Episcopal) - 42,000, in contrast with 76,741 reported in 1949 - showed a very substantial drop. Christian leaders told the Quaker delegation last winter that membership is now about what it was before liberation, that there had been a drop immediately after liberation, but that gradually the figures had come back to approximately the same as before. Figures from the Futsing District of the Methodist Church in the Foochow Conference bear out this latter statement. The 1949 Minutes showed this district as having ten circuits, 20 preachers (including local preachers and assistants), 2280 members and 1375 probationers. Tien Feng for February 6, 1956, reports this district as having ten circuits plus two "mission" appointments and four branch churches, "more than ten" preachers and 3500 church members. The report is written by Miss Chen Yun-ching, whom we tentatively designated in the April 30 Bulletin as "the first woman district superintendent in Methodism." This report does not clear up the question of her appointment, but it does seem to be written "with authority", so it is quite possible that the designation is correct. In that case, our Chinese friends implemented in advance the action of the Methodist General Conference in Minneapolis in May of this year!

The report gives a five year account of work on the Futsing District. In 1951 all the work had to be closed down while land reform was going on, but it was all reopened in 1952. That and the following year were years of consolidation, in which the membership lists were revised and the local churches reorganized. Gradually the work of the church returned to normal and the pastors began to receive a living wage. Under the protection of the government property questions were satisfactorily settled, and the churches received necessary repairs. The fears of many members we allayed as we proclaimed the government principle of religious belief. "We the Lord Himself working in the sacred work of the church, turning like a great wheel to change the face of the church, thus laying the foundation for the future work of the church."